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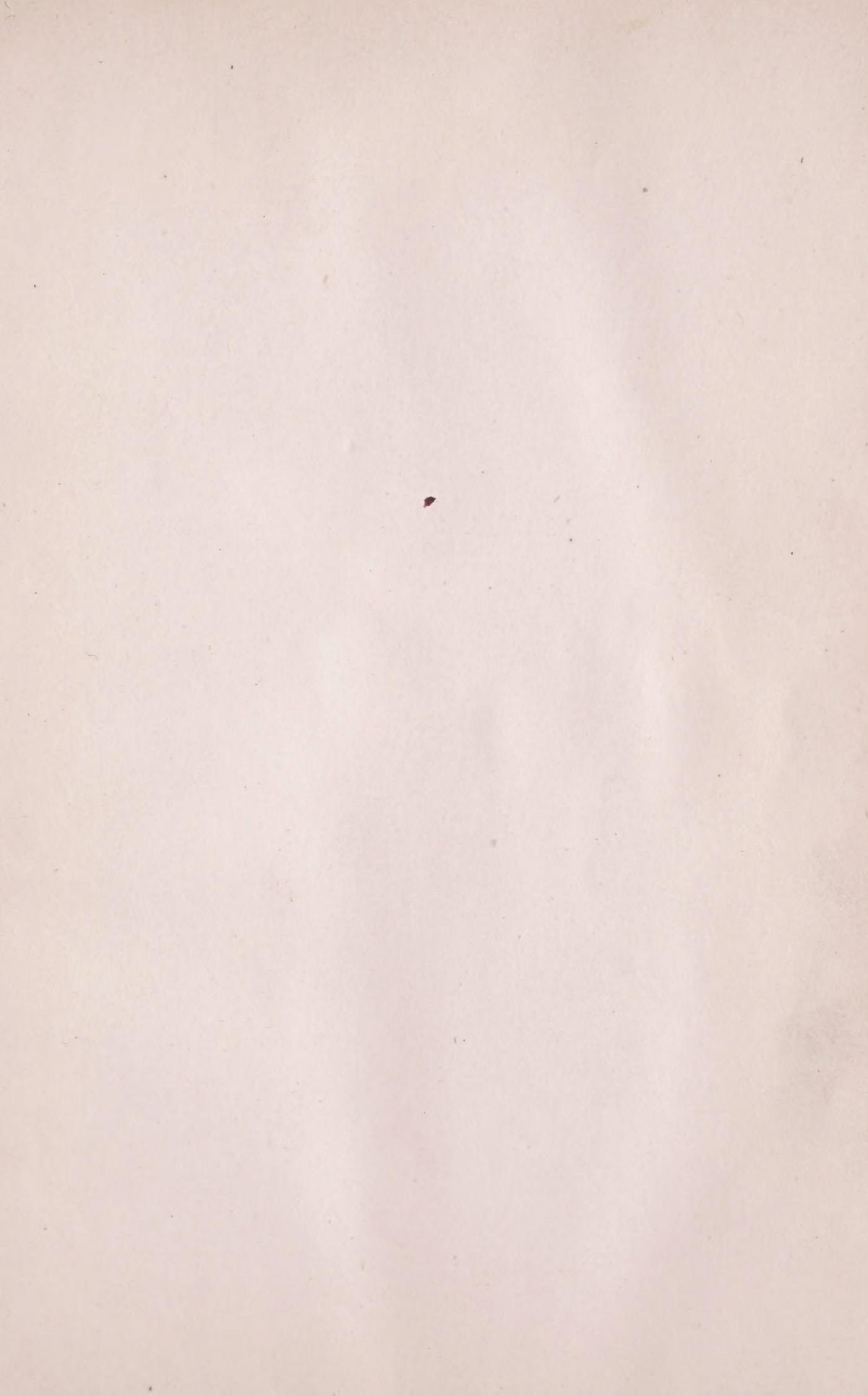
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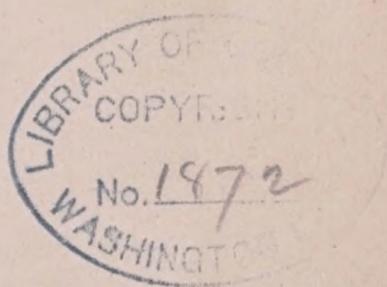
VIOLETTA AND I.

BY COUSIN KATE.

psnd.

Marie
EDITED BY

M. Jone M CINTOSH.



— “gentleness and love and trust
Prevail o'er angry wave and gust.”

— LONGFELLOW.

*have another copy at Boston p. 134
see Recs p. 134*

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VIOLETTA AND I.

CHAPTER I.

IT is an old saying that the old love to recall the days of their youth, and so common a one that it hardly seems worth noting down in the first line I write ; and yet, but for its great truth, I should never have written here at all ; for, ever since I can remember, my dear grandmother has been telling me tales of what happened when she was a young girl like me. Of the earliest of these I cannot remember much, except that they bore some reference to little girls who never grew tired of three rounds in stocking-knitting, — among whom my grandmother always classed herself, — and I call to mind that I could not believe she had ever been anything but my grandmother ; and when, on one occasion, she mentioned how large a baby she had been, weighing more by two pounds, she said, than the generality of babies nowadays, my clumsy little fingers let two stitches drop while wondering how very funny the steeple cap must have looked on such a little grandmother, and whether the

silver shoe-buckles had not been enlarged, they being much too big for baby feet in their present state.

My grandmother and I lived in a small cottage, several miles distant from a little fishing hamlet, and except a few poor women who came to her for healing drinks or salves, we did not see many persons. Polly, our servant, told me I came to the cottage when I was a little maid of only three years, and that my mother had died when I was born. From my father we often had long letters, and in them all he spoke of a large fortune to be made; but as time passed on and he did not come, I lost faith in the great house and the diamond shoe-buckles that the fortune was to bring; and, after many months of silence, there came news, in a letter bordered with black, that my father had died within sight of the fortune that had proved such an evil fairy to him; and my grandmother and I were alone in the world.

I was sixteen then, and after my father's death I saw how greatly my grandmother's affections had been set upon him; for her strength seemed suddenly to fail her, and she lavished on me pet names, and tender, endearing little words, that I think she must have murmured over his baby cradle, they had such power to soothe. About this time it was, she loved to take her tea in our little vine-covered porch, and in the twilight would tell me of her own youth. One morning, she seemed specially calm and peaceful, and as I sat beside her, the distant roar of the sea, mingling itself with the honeysuckle fragrance, the quiet stars look-

ing in upon us, she first began to tell me of her sister Violetta and herself, before they parted for their different homes. I cannot tell what first recalled my aunt to her mind on that evening. Perhaps it was that she thought I felt lonely, and lacked companionship, having only her for company. However that may be, as I removed the little tea-tray, and sat down beside her, she smoothed my hair with her hand, and said, in tones the sweetest I have ever heard, "Thou hast no sister, dear heart, to bear thee company; but I will tell thee of Violetta, who was mine;" and so she began, and in the quiet, August evening the story written here was told to me; and I wrote it down, because those who gather round my knee will never be able to hear it from her calm lips, as I did, and I would not have it fade from our remembrance. In many instances I have given my grandmother's style; but as a general thing to make continued use of "thee and thou," as she always did, was tedious to me, I not having been accustomed to use that mode as a child, and I wrote it down after my own fashion.

CHAPTER II.

THE first thing I can remember in life was thinking my sister Violetta the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. I was short and square, and like my father; she was tall and graceful, and even in discharging the simple household duties that fell to her lot, she gave to them a beauty that not even our mother had seemed capable of bringing out. Did she but sprinkle water from her soft, white hand upon a tuft of Texas pinks, the tiny bells seemed each to nod and smile, and blush to deeper pink, because of Violetta's kindness; and the white pigeons, that seemed to regard my father and myself as natural enemies, would circle round her head, and coo in very happiness if allowed to sit upon her shoulder, or peck dainty morsels from her hand.

There was a difference of ten years in our ages, so that when she was twenty, I had only numbered ten, and we two were the only children; we had neither sisters nor brothers. My mother, I am sure, was an inch or two taller than my father, and if anything could have been an exact copy of the two, it was Violetta and I. She was tall and finely formed; her brown hair shaded a brow that was clear and white, and her eyes, so large and blue, expressed so much strength, and yet so much love in their

soft depths, as to leave one in doubt which would have the mastery, love or resolution. I think she knew very early how beautiful she was, and the knowledge, instead of making her vain, only gave to her a little commanding way, which all of us were ready to accord as her right,—for there was not one of us who had not made her an especial idol,—and so we all grew to doing very much as Violetta willed in all things. She was the inseparable companion of my mother. I was ever near my father. In her young days, my mother must have been very like what Violetta was at twenty.

We lived then in a queer old house, in a small settlement near the ocean, and my father was the only physician. The house had originally three large rooms built of tabby (a composition of lime and sand), to which my father added a walled room with a thatched roof, and two wooden buildings; to one of these he gave a steeple roof and to the other a flat roof, with square blocks of wood placed at regular intervals around it. Each corner was surmounted with a wooden figure, meant to represent an eagle, and to do duty as a weather-cock. No one had ever heard of more than one being necessary; but father, who was ever of a sociable turn, declared he could never sleep with such a lonely bird perched on the roof; so, in the slightest gale, the four great birds did duty faithfully to the time of his death. I think father's kind old heart reproached him for having only paid four pounds for his four favorites, and if

he could have sent the merchant an extra pound or so, he would have been relieved.

From the house on the hill, our house always put me in mind of a patchwork quilt. This house, on what we called the hill, was Bailey Manor, and was built on the highest ground near us. It looked like an old castle, it was so large and roomy. At the time of which I speak, it was closed, there being only one left of the large family that had once owned it, and he being absent across the seas, no one knew where; though I sometimes thought Violetta could have given an accurate guess, had any one but me thought to ask so odd a question. But my mother was busy with her maids, my father with his drugs, and I was but an idle little maiden, on whom sun or rain failed to make any impression, as I strayed about, charming butterflies or gathering wild flowers. Often as I followed such pastime, my father's old gig would appear with Thomas as outrider, and I would be lifted into it, and jog around with my father.

When I recall the kind of practice this dear old gentleman did, I am often troubled at the force of an unpleasant truth. I often have to own to myself that he would not have stood very high at this day; for he believed physic a humbug, and nature the best doctor; and though I never doubted, when he was telling me so, that he was right, yet many learned men have arisen, and many learned things are now in fashion, and it is clear to me my father did not practise as

they do. The older he grew, the fewer medicines did he carry in his square chest, and I sometimes thought his dear memory was failing him. He prescribed frequently, "fresh air" and "fresh water." Once I feared he had made the wife of a Dutch skipper very angry. She brought her little child to my father's office, and for the life of me I could not tell which was its head and which its feet, as it lay across her bosom, so completely was it enwrapped in shawls. I saw a queer little smile in the corner of my father's eye, as he commenced unrolling the wrappings, until he came to a poor, little, smothered, white face, — all the while listening to a crowd of ailments. To my surprise, he handed the little thing over to me; and bade me sit with it in the sunshine; and, as I carried it out, I heard him say to the mother, "Sunshine, madam, that's the first prescription, and don't cost a cent; fresh water, madam, that's the next, and fully as cheap, — not a thimbleful, to start it crying, with no beneficial effects, but a tubful, madam, enough to wet the whole of its little skin at once;" and then I heard a great oath from my father, for he sometimes said such things when very much excited, though he always expressed his regret afterwards for having done so. The oath, now it seems, was because the little morsel I held in my arms so tightly, for fear the sunshine would melt it, or the sea-breeze coax it away, ate "things," just as the burly skipper and his wife did, — a fact which the honest Dutchwoman told with great pride.

Though I am certain my father would not have wounded the feelings of a humming-bird, yet it sounded wickedly to me when he said, "Madam, with such a taste, I fear your child will not be content with milk and honey, which is, I hear, the simple diet of a better world." When she comprehended him fully, I heard her sobbing gently, and my father's old, kind manner returning, he told her that we had Bible doctrine for milk for babes, and not strong meat; and when she had gone away hugging the little one up to her motherly heart, and stopping every now and then to kiss it, I said, "Father, how could you make her cry about the babe?" and he said, as he drew me on his knee, smoothing the curly locks so like his own: —

"Sweet heart, did I ever make thee cry but for thine own good? Tears shed for innocent error are not bitter; only conscious guilt draws burning tears. When thy little hands lifted the young mocking-birds from their nest last spring, and I told thee how the mother would grieve for her lost nestlings, thy tears fell fast; but they were quenched, dear little heart, when I restored them to their nest. So with yonder poor woman. She lifted her baby from the proper place where God put it, and she only cried to see what she had done, as thou didst; but she will not cry any more, for only mismanagement ailed the babe, and she will bear in mind what I told her concerning it."

And several months after, the same woman came; but the baby was so rosy, I hardly knew it. Wherever a patch

of sunshine fell, it crawled over the floor towards it, and once I saw it trying to catch a beam, which slanted in through the lattice ; and I thought my father must have given it some drugs ; but he only said, “ Nay, thou little medicine-chest, not any of thy drugs ! ” and afterwards, as was his common habit, when he could think of nothing else to tell Thomas to do, he lifted me on his knee and bade him burnish the instruments, — those instruments that his dear old hands never touched if he could help it, and which he kept as bright as silver, but always locked up in the skeleton case. The skeleton, my mother told me, he, one day, not long after they were married, took from its case and buried ; and in the village church-yard stands a slab with the inscription, “ An Unknown Gentleman,” and underneath is my father’s office skeleton. It was a tender point ever after with him, and my mother often said the buried skeleton did her more service than two live men could do ; for my father would give her anything she asked if she would but keep silent about this. “ He had always considered it ungentlemanly and unneighborly to refuse a Christian man decent burial ; and he hated the ghastly thing shut up in his office, any way,” he would say, when teased by my mother, who never failed to say, “ Maybe he was a Turk or a Frencher, goodman ; and anyway I care not for thee to be neighborly towards skeletons ; ” whereupon he would get up and make reply : —

"To the half of my kingdom, my girl, will I give thee,
an thou wilt but hold thy tongue."

And so we all had gold chains, that came across the water, to say our Easter prayers in, and I agreed with my mother that my father's good, though eccentric heart, led him to do many an odd deed. Having lived out of the world so long, he knew as little of its ways as a child, and many little things, such as turning dress skirts, and making over our gloves again, had to be done at home, because our father's old purse never came home from a journey with anything but the sixpence for good luck in it,—there were so many who knew, as well as we, the way into the gentle old heart.

CHAPTER III.

ON Easter Sunday, I call to mind how very fine I felt, — so fine that I forgot entirely until we had got into the church to look and see if my mother and Violetta were so very finely dressed too, and just as I turned to look, my mother touched my hands, and bade me look at them, and “not be staring like an ill-mannered child in church ;” and so it was not until we were journeying home in the family coach, that I noticed how pale Violetta was, and that her hand trembled as she held her prayer-book within it. Her dress was of blue silk, laced up both back and front with great silver cords, and the ruff on her throat was of very fine lace, while sprigs of the lilies of the valley, in her hat, fell upon her shoulders and rested against her dark hair. My father and mother were speaking of the failing health of our pastor, and discoursing of the great merits of such plain sermons as he delivered, which contained not so many big words that poor and unlearned persons could not understand them ; and then they fell to wondering who it was the good man had prayed for in church, and my father said, in an aggrieved way, “The poor body should have everything he needed by to-morrow, God willing,” and my mother shut her eyes in a significant manner, implying

that she knew she would have to hide a few extra things that we had, for one night, as it was a favorite maxim of our father, that "no man needs two of the same thing;" and so we rarely ever had more than we immediately needed of any eatable in the house, as he always gave away the surplus. After they had talked on for some time of other things, Violetta and I being silent, they returned again to the services at church, and in my father's quick way he asked : —

"And pray, wife, who do we know in that ship's company, that our good pastor prayed so earnestly for ?" and my mother shook her head and said : —

"Nay, husband, how should I know what faileth thy memory ? I make certain I have no kinsfolk or acquaintance on board."

And my father, looking out at the sky, which had cleared off that morning, after a heavy gale of wind, said : —

"Let us pray, wife, that the good ship has weathered the gale, and entered a safe harbor, with her company uninjured."

And just then I looked towards Violetta, and though my father had not asked her to pray for the ship's safety, yet I am certain she did so, more earnestly than my mother, for her lips were very wan and colorless, and were moving very quickly, and as her eyes sought the sea they had such a wild, restless, feverish look in them, as if the great waves alone could quiet them. And all the next day

she watched the waves, and spent the afternoon in the little summer-house that overlooked the beach at the north end of our garden, and at one time she left it and went to her room for a skein of wool for her tambour work, and I saw what struck me as very odd for one who knew her business so well, that my sister had worked a rose-bud upside down, and it seemed so good a joke that I ran to tell my father; but he was taking his afternoon nap, and we did not disturb any of his naps; so the fun went untold, until, as Violetta was putting me to bed at twilight, and her fingers trembled so she could not unlace my bodice, I said:—

“Violetta, was it because your fingers trembled so much, that you made that rose-bud in the tambour work upside down?” And she said:—

“Your eyes are too big, Maggie, larger than mine, for I did not see my mistake.” And I shut my eyes as if to sleep, and said:—

“Please to tell me what I am to see and what I am not to see, sister Violetta;” and then she smiled a faint smile.

“See all you can, Maggie, love. It is a bad plan to see only one thing, hear only one voice, know only one person;” and then she kissed me, and I fell asleep soon after, and it was many days before I remembered or understood what she had said.

CHAPTER IV.

EASTER week, the old clergyman who taught us gave me a holiday, as is the common custom, and though many were the plans my mother and Violetta concerted between them for that holiday, I cannot recall any that I adopted. I took much more readily to my father's views, which were a silver sixpence in the morning, and permission to do as I pleased for the balance of the day, — the only limitation being that I should keep within a mile of home. Violetta frowned, for she had a new stitch to teach me, and my mother said : —

“ I am sure, Violetta, the father forgets she is not a boy, which I cannot marvel at, seeing she doesn't resemble either you or me.”

I went off with the last words echoing in my ears, heartily wishing I was a boy, now that my mother seemed to doubt my being ever taken for a girl; and I made this fine resolve, that, instead of sewing, and knitting, and looking after the maids, I would practise physic, and for fear of my father's making fun of so young a student, I determined to call upon Thomas to teach me all he knew. I had no very clear idea of how much that “ all ” comprised; but I had seen him often make bread pills for amusement,

which, though rather too large to swallow, looked very shapely. So up I sprang from the green bank whereupon I had been seated, and away I darted for Thomas, who, as I saw from the window, was in the little room back of the office, spelling out of a spelling-book to himself. He was never out of calling distance of my father, and, though almost as old as he was, still possessed a great desire for learning, and for years and years had kept a book just at hand to pick up when disengaged, — which I may safely say was very often. When I reached the window it was with difficulty I could speak, so out of breath was I; for, though in my tenth year, I was not taller than a girl of seven, and I was almost as broad as I was long.

"Take me in the window, Thomas," I said, "just as fast as ever you can."

"Gracious me, miss!" said Thomas, "what can be to pay? Be anything after you?"

"Be quick now, Thomas, and do not make a noise, for Bettie, the maid, will take me up in a minute, to darn this great rent."

"But, miss, you are not so small as when you was a baby, and what can you be after? The measles is taking the rounds; has you got 'em?"

"No!" I said in great disdain; "nothing has got me, and if you will not take me in, I shall never learn the 'medical science.'"

These two last words I had heard my father use, and

they acted like magic on Thomas; for he instantly lifted my weighty little person in through the window, taking very thoughtful care to put the side with the rent nearest him, that the vigilant eyes of Bettie might not detect it; which was very kind of him, I shall always think.

"Now, miss!" he said.

"O Thomas!" I began, clasping my fingers together to keep from being too much overcome, "you know I can't bear to be a girl any longer?"

"Miss!"

"Oh, but I can't, Thomas! and if I can't be a man to practise medicine, I shan't be anything."

"But miss!" exclaimed Thomas, his face an awful mixture of doubt and consternation, "I can't see as how and why."

"Well, now listen," I said, "and I'll tell you; only, Thomas, be very still, for it is a secret. My mother says I'm such a great romp, and so very little like what I should be,—lady-like and all such things, which my father is not,—that I've made up my mind to stop sewing, and learn physic, and practise, and have a gig, and a man to beat the mortar, and do like my father and you, Thomas, and not like my mother and Violetta any more."

"God save us, and particularly you, miss!" said Thomas.

Thinking I might learn to be dignified by myself, I

said with great composure, “I hope he will, Thomas; but when will you begin to teach me?”

“Me, miss!”

“Yes, you, Thomas, and I’m ready to learn right away. Now, what’s that? and that?” and I pointed to several jars containing different liquids.

“Lord knows, not I, Miss Maggie; and if you even so much as touches them, you is dead.”

Here was something I had not come prepared for, and I felt my heart sink at his ignorance of the three first questions; so I said, while my eyes filled with tears of disappointment, which never failed to touch his heart: —

“Thomas, if you only knew how I want to be a doctor!”

“A doctor, miss, a real live doctor! Is you certain that’s what you wants?”

“Yes, quite certain, and quite sure too, Thomas.”

“Well, in the first place, you has to get hard-hearted. You mustn’t cry when you falls down, and you must be glad when anybody else does; so you can cut off their heads, and arms, and legs. How is you going to get hardened, miss?”

And I only put in a very feeble “I don’t know.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. Yonder goes Josey, the cook’s boy, to kill ducks for dinner to-morrow, and you must just stand up like a brave little doctor and see Josey do it; and keep on looking at Josey every day, until you’d rather a great sight see Josey kill things than anything else.”

"O Thomas, I never could go by myself. If I've got to do it, couldn't you come with me?"

"Well, yes, miss; but I can't do it after this once. Doctors aint allowed no supporters;" and so Thomas went with me, and as we neared the poultry-yard, I wanted to run away dreadfully, but was unwilling to abandon my chosen profession so early; so I stood it until the great axe was raised in the air, and then I ran as if for my very life, and only caught my breath as I fell into Violetta's arms, who sat in the little arbor, and Violetta said I was *some* kind of a child; but I was too terribly impressed then with the horrors of a medical education to remember what kind she said I was.

CHAPTER V.

FOR the balance of my Easter holidays, I preferred leading a quiet life; so the days passed without anything happening that was worth narrating, until the Saturday morning, or rather noon.

I had taken my pet kitten, and was lying near an old stone fence, which separated Bailey Manor from our grounds, and was almost asleep, for aught I remember, when my little pet showed signs of hostility, and, opening my sleepy eyes more fully, I saw the handsome head of a dog just perceptible above the fence. Gathering the kitten in my arms, I prepared to leave that part of the ground,—for I in no way admired dogs myself,—when, just a step or so behind my shoulder, I saw the kindly face of Mr. Reginald Guy, the owner of Bailey Manor, who had, without my knowing it, returned from abroad. He was the first to speak, as I was shy towards strangers. He said: “Why, here we are, little Meg; and how are Mistress Violetta and the others at home?” and I, dropping a courtesy, replied in the most approved manner my mother and Violetta had ever taught me: “We thank you very kindly, sir, and we are all very well;” and he smiled so kindly I felt emboldened to say, though I but half knew

if I did right or not, "My sister Violetta had no color in her cheeks on Sunday, and none again on Monday; but she is very easy now, we thank you."

When I said this, he said to me, taking my hand the while, "Thou art so good a little Meg, I have a mind to give thee a little playmate, who I have brought home with me;" and when he saw my wondering looks, for I never could control the expression of my eyes, he went on to say, "We are going to know each other better now than we ever did, Maggie, and I want you to take my little Otilia under your wing, and make her cheeks as rosy as yours are."

And then I came to know that he had brought home his little motherless daughter; though why we had suddenly become such good friends, I could not just then tell; for though he had been at our homestead very often, and I was as good a little Meg then as I was at this time, he had taken very little notice of my goodness. And when I went home, I straightway ran to Violetta, who was gathering the dead leaves from the plants in her bedroom window, and, catching hold of her gown, I said, "Violetta, do listen to me while I tell you something. Mr. Guy has come, and has brought a little child for me to take care of;" and from the time I said Mr. Guy, she took my hands in hers, and said, while such a rosy color stole into her cheeks: —

"Thou art a dove this evening, Maggie, and dost bring me a very welcome olive-leaf."

All of which I could not understand, and though she kissed me once and then again, she did not look as if she cared to talk, and I, not wishing to be silent, went down into my father's office; though after my recent adventure with Thomas I did not even look towards the inner room door, for fear he should want me to learn my first lesson over again. And the next day, which was Sunday, so soon as I awoke I heard Violetta stirring, and I said : —

“ Violetta, did you not sing to your lute last night, after you had put me in my bed, and were you not on the porch till late ? ” and she said : —

“ I did have my lute, and I sang too, sweetheart, but I cannot say I sang to it.”

And I turned off, and pretended to be going again to sleep, for oftentimes that was just the way mother or Violetta began when I needed correction in my grammar, or some other thing I liked full as little. Violetta never had looked so lovely as she did that day at church ; and when she was going home, Mr. Guy did most carefully stow her away in the coach, not letting so much as a fold of her silk get creased, or rub against the wheel. I wondered why Thomas, who had always done it, only helped my mother and me in ; and I fell to thinking all the way home how handsome Mr. Guy was ; and yet, even as a child, I remember often thinking it was because of a certain noble manner, that I thought him handsome. Towards women and children there was such an odd, deferential manner about

him, and in talking to old gentlemen there was one thing I so clearly remember, — he always held his hat in his hand, though, on one occasion, the man was only his white-haired boot-maker. True to his promise, on Monday morning he came over with little Otilia, and I call to mind I was not pleased that he bade her put her arms round Violetta's neck and kiss her twice; seeing that I was to take such special care of her, I thought I was entitled to the first kiss.

The little Otilia was just three years old, and I did not wonder at her father for wishing a rosier color in her cheeks than lived there when she came to us. She was very tiny, very fair, and very winning. I am certain she must look as her poor little German mother had done; for she was not in the least like her father, Mr. Guy. Such deep blue eyes, and such soft, fair hair, that was just long enough to braid behind her tiny ears! And they dressed her so oddly, too; and then, her broken English sounded so sweet and childish. I remember, like one in a dream that now fades, now brightens, how timidly she hid behind her father as he brought her in; and when he lifted her on his knee, and saw how curiously the German gown and tight little cap struck our eyes, he said: —

“Mistress Violetta, and little Meg, have I not brought you a little Dutch doll?”

My sister Violetta's color deepened on her fair cheeks, but I, though I felt mine to see, could not

find that I had blushed at all. It was not until by and by that I found out why Violetta was now always either blushing or smiling; and the large, betrothal ring helped me more to a conclusion than anything else did. Besides, Otilia was now almost constantly with us, and nothing so pleased my father as when the quiet little thing would take her seat at his feet in the office, and either hush to sleep a great rag doll our Bettie had made her, or sing, as she gently rocked herself, fragments of little German hymns, that sounded very sweet and clear in that baby voice. She dearly loved to walk about, and often I see, if I but close my eyes, my father walking about the garden, with Otilia clinging tightly to his hand, and the two, the gray and the golden-haired, seemed such company for each other.

From the time she came, I began to lose my childish ways, and now when there was one so much smaller, I looked upon myself as company for my mother and Violetta, and condescended to learn how to do many useful things. So little Otilia helped me too. Each day we saw more clearly how her father's heart idolized her, and once, as they two sat in the porch, I heard him say:—

“Violetta, perhaps I do wrong to make so great an idol of such a frail little being. She is the only fair thing that is left me of a mournful past, as thou, true love, art all that is fair and lovely in the present.”

What she made reply I did not hear, but his voice

sounded clear, and full of the earnest truth of what he felt. He was saying: —

"Nay, love, I could not say 'Thy will be done' so soon as that. I fear if God so smote me, I should be all my life trying to bring my rebellious heart to feel submission to his will; and if human instrumentality robbed me of my little one, God knows, I fear, I never could forgive."

Somehow these words strangely kept coming again and again into my mind, though the more continually I saw Violetta with Mr. Guy, the more continually my heart kept saying over in low murmurs to itself, "Thou alone art worthy of her," for since they had been betrothed, the old, commanding way, that used of old to be Violetta's only defect, seemed to be gone entirely; and my mother smiled, and I pondered often how gently obedient to every wish of his she had become.

The marriage was to take place in our simple village church in the month of November, and my mother and the maids lost no time in storing chests with linen and preserves and other household goods, which was the only marriage portion her betrothed would have her bring him; and such being the case my mother said they should be of the most expensive kind.

This was the month of July.

CHAPTER VI.

THE summer passed off very quietly for us, who were so busy getting my sister Violetta ready for her new home; and though it was a dreary thought that she would no more be our own Violetta, still we could not damp her joy by our grief; so the mother, only to keep her heart up, scolded Bettie more. Bettie, who did not seem to mind it, told me, "The mistress was so full it was likely there must be a floodgate somewhere," and "she was sure she was neither high-minded, nor above being of service to the mistress at any time;" and I, who could not always keep my tears for private luxury, once or twice threw my arms around Violetta, and there sobbed out my grief; and I remember on one occasion she said:—

"Nay, little Meg, instead of making me sad by thy tears, tell me what thou canst do for the mother when I am gone;" which only made me sob the more, and I said, very wickedly:—

"I wish, sister Violetta, that the great ghost, that Bettie says is never tired of eating up bad men and little girls, had eaten a dozen times over the wicked man;" and Violetta smiled so sweet a smile, and asked:—

"What man, Maggie? I know of none that is so wicked as to be eaten by the ghost;" and I said:—

"How can you say so, Violetta, when but for thee I should never have known him at all, seeing that he never thought me good until one summer's day he wanted to know if you were well."

A rosy blush coming into Violetta's cheeks, she put her arms around me and said, while her soft cheek touched mine, all wet with tears:—

"Do not fret now, dear little heart, and do not try to love the wicked man; but just keep open a tiny corner of thy little heart, and even before thou knowest he will have come in and made thee love him; he is so kind and true. It is not likely for thee now to think upon such things; but some day, thou too, little sister, will have learned how we who are weak must cling to that which is by nature so much stronger."

She kissed me very softly, and now that my tears were dried, I asked:—

"And wilt thou love me too, as well as ever, when he shall have got you all to himself, Violetta?"

In so low a voice she said:—

"Earnest love for some good man does not close the heart from its other loved ones; it only makes one see how beautiful love is, and we are ready to love all who come near us. Only wait, Maggie, and thou wilt see."

And after that we took a walk, and I did not feel very

jealous when, at the turning of the road, we met Mr. Guy, and by degrees I was walking by myself, seeing that Violetta could not any longer be said to be walking with anybody but the heir of Bailey Manor.

It was about this time that my father first began to get from a distant town a small paper that treated of many things, but more especially of the stars, and many persons of our acquaintance said it was not proper to have such superstitious things about; but he always said, "the man must be very weak who could not read without being biased;" and then the neighbors would oftentimes say, that "books that pretended to know the weather, and the waves, and the signs of the times could not fail to do one thing, which was, *bias one to the evil one*;" and my father once said rather suddenly to them:—

"Neighbors, can you tell me what is coming, when the sky grows dark with clouds and we hear thunder in the distance?" and they said:—

"How now, are we fools, not to know that we shall have rain?"

And thereupon my father's eyes twinkled with merry good-humor, and he said:—

"Well, then, neighbors, is it not possible that some men may not need to wait until the clouds gather to predict a storm?"

At another time he replied in this manner to them:—

"If you will be wise to some purpose, have the doors

and windows strengthened with good oak bars, and a safe shelter for man and beast; for to my notion the wind from the sea has a wail, and the heavens an unsettled look; so, be warned in time, good friends." And my mother, who, she being busy all the time, could not read the paper, said: —

"Goodman, now thou art doing what thou never didst, taking a stitch in time; only thou art up too early, seeing the rent is not yet made, for the sky is as blue as my best gown, and as free from cloud as our Violetta's life."

He said: —

"Nay, then, Margaret, it is not to be supposed that a woman, as busy as thou ever art, should ken more things than one;" and in her usual, quick way my mother laid her stout hand upon his shoulder, and said: —

"Husband, had we not better add an oaken bar or so, to keep thy skeleton from returning to its case?"

He answered: —

"What is it, Meg? Silver and gold have I none in the house, for neighbor Draymond has all I had to fetch his crippled boy home; but so sure as thou art still, I will give thee the next instalment I may have."

This put an end to the discussion, for the present at least; but I never could see that reading the strange paper, which was called an almanac, ever did my dear old father any good. On the contrary, as the month of August waned and September set in with an earlier fall

than usual, he grew silent, and oftentimes sad ; his old gig went more frequently to the homes of the lowly than to those of the rich, and my mother said, with real sorrow, that “the father was becoming very silent, and no longer minded the skeleton or its empty case ;” which to my mother was equal to some failure in the banking-houses across the water, as my father’s being so sensitive was an exchequer she could always draw upon. Much of his old wit and dry humor left him also, and he seemed like some good husbandman, who will shortly set out on a journey. The little Otilia, in her shy, dreamy way, seemed to be a better companion to him than any other, and often the two would sit together in the office porch, and Otilia would sing to him, sometimes little hymns, sometimes broken parts of a German chant, that she had heard from her old nurse, the hazy sunlight, as it fell upon the pair, showing often that both had fallen asleep ; and I said to myself as I saw them, that the pure heart of the child rested against the pure heart of the man ; for through all of life’s warfare could there be any more simple, more tender, than this gray-haired father ? I think, when he entered heaven, the little children, who love the guileless and the good, must have led his feet by the golden river, and never known how he was old and weary in this world before he came to theirs, — so little had the years touched the true heart.

Late one evening, as he sat with Otilia in his arms, he bade her sing him a little childish hymn, the words of

which I cannot recall ; but it seems to me they were of "a home for little children;" and while the little voice sang, I heard my father singing with her, very softly, and at the end of the second verse she left off, and, putting one arm round his neck, said : —

" You sing so fine, so little and small, nobody can hear you. The Lord Christ, who lives up in the heavens, cannot hear you, but only me, if you sing in such a very little fine voice."

My fathered answered : —

" Though I were only to whisper, little babe, he could hear, and I had rather he only should hear."

And after that she never teased him to sing louder, but he always sang with her ; often with much patience she taught him her little tunes and verses.

CHAPTER VII.

SUMMER glided into autumn, and though the warm weather still tarried, the laborers had gathered in the greater portion of the harvest, and life was at its height.

One afternoon, as I sat in the hall, and Mr. Guy and Violetta were in the family room,—she parcelling out for some friends her different flower-seeds, but lately shed from the parent stem; he trying to help, but from her laughter, sadly hindering her,—I heard her laughter suddenly cease, and the cause I caught in what he was saying:—

“If I could stay, I would certainly not leave just yet, but thou thyself shalt decide for me; and after I have told thee, I have little doubt which way thou wilt decide; for though thou art so loving, there is a will in thee, that prompts thee to grasp life after thine own fashion.”

“That were unkind, Reginald, seeing that I have had but little will since I have known thee.”

“You would rather say, true love, that loving has been thy will in the present case, which does but prove that I am right; for even before I knew thee well, thine eyes commanded love, and I obeyed. It did not take me long to

learn that commands for such as thou, needs must be obeyed, or I should have but small peace with myself."

"If I should say I must have time to believe such a doctrine, — one that is both new and strange, seeing I have always believed a contrary one, — you will tell it to me until I've learned better; if it needs be, over and over again. I shall never tire of the same old tale."

"I will tell you from now until the sound of my voice is but an echo in this world. In heaven I shall still say the same,—always, always, the same tale, save that as thou and I go down together, the lips will have taught their music to the souls, and they will sing it anew in a better world, as if it were only just begun."

And after that there was a long silence, — so long that I had well-nigh fallen asleep, — or the low tones of Mr. Guy were inaudible to me. For some time, either they were very low or I had fallen asleep; when I waked or heard next, Violetta was speaking, and she said in answer to something from him: —

"I could not say it would not seem unkind to stay away when surely he needs you more than I; so, if it remains with me to decide, I say it is but duty to go, though I shall miss thee sadly."

"But, Violetta, pardon me, if I speak my whole mind; if I remained over until the next week, might I not carry thee? It lacks but two months of the time, and I care not one stiver for the chests thy mother sees fit for you to have.

The little one also could go with us, and I would have all with me then, and not be fearing every moment some harm were coming, to hasten me home."

And as I heard this, the great tears welled up in my eyes, for I dreaded to have her go so soon. But I need not have feared, for Violetta answered, with something of the old firmness, that "it could not be;" and after some more talking from him, he went away; and later in the day I heard the household saying, "how that Mr. Guy was going on a journey to his uncle, who was like to die, and Violetta was to keep an eye on the little Otilia during his absence."

So, two days afterwards, he came to bid us all good-by, and though my father and mother were standing by, he kissed my sister Violetta's hand, which I remember thinking very bold, until my father said, that, "seeing he was bound for so long a journey, he might kiss her cheek;" which thereupon he did, to my seeming nothing loth; and I thought surely Violetta must wish the floor to open and take her in, she must be so confused at such strange conduct; but, instead, I do not think she noticed much of anything. I am certain she lost sight of father, mother, and me.

After he had gone, Violetta was as busy as my mother, having nothing to hinder her, and I took it upon myself once to say:—

"It is very nice now, sister Violetta, that you have

nothing to hinder you from helping our mother and the maids about the things."

To which she said:—

"Where can all the odd speeches you make come from, Maggie? I do not know, but of the two, I would rather have the hindrance than the things."

And one day I remember there came a great letter to Violetta; and I, thinking it must contain all the news that they had so much of in the great world beyond our village, ran with my basket of work to Violetta's room, and asked her about the stars, and the shape of the new gowns, and everything else that had been a matter of doubt in our household; and she said "there was nothing of the kind in her letter." I could not then understand how so large a letter could be written with nothing at all in it; and when I knew, by the bundle of paper and the different materials for writing, that she was to answer it, I collected up all the news I could hear, and told it all to Violetta, for fear she should forget; and she failed at last to put any of it in; which I thought unpardonable, and my mother gave me a band of linen to stitch, so that I might not vex Violetta while she wrote.

CHAPTER VIII.

My father surprised us all one morning, when it had been storming a little, by having a carpenter fasten great oaken bars to the doors and windows of the hall, and the three centre rooms of our house, and my mother said, “Goodman, are we being fastened in a jail, and hast thou turned jailer?” to which he said, while he consulted the weather-cocks, “I have a great fear, Margaret, that foul weather is in store for us.”

And all the following night the wind blew steadily, and rattled the window-panes, so that Violetta grew restless and said, “Surely, all the ghosts that Bettie loves to frighten thee with, Little Meg, must be abroad to night, the wind is so searching;” and again, before we fell asleep, she said, “I trust me the old German nurse is taking proper care of the little Otilia, as I feel in some way answerable for her well-being.” And in the morning when I waked, the wind was blowing very fiercely, and the waves were mountain high; so that I said at breakfast to my father, that the sea had put on white caps in honor of the sea-king’s marriage; which was another of Bettie’s stories. We had only risen from the table, when a messenger came to say

the little Otilia was not well, and the nurse would like my father to come over. So, after a few moments spent in putting cloaks about us, we went,—my father, Violetta, and I,—and Violetta and I concluded to stay awhile and wait until the wind had lessened, and my father, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, went upon a distant call; for a poor man's wife was at death's door, and could not find any rest. So, after charging us to take care of ourselves, he set out, to be back, he said, “God willing, towards sunset;” and somehow I could not keep my eyes from following him, though Bettie had ever taught me not to speed travellers by looking after them, unless, indeed, I had an old shoe to break the spell by flinging after them.

And all the day long, the wind blew as it had done the night before, and my mother sent us word to tarry at the manor until next morning, and towards day—for Violetta and I could not sleep, but sat up near each other, and said parts of the Bible that we could call to mind—the wind increased fearfully, though still from a quarter that did not bring the sea up. Violetta said it would lull soon, and then we could go home, or perhaps our father would come by for us in the gig, which would haply be much better, as Otilia was not well. So we sent our mother word that we would be coming on very soon, most likely with our father, and we sat to wait the wind's lulling; which did not take place until near four o'clock, when it softened down, and we were thinking of going, and had been getting

Otilia ready, when all in a moment it sprang up with a terrible violence, and we saw it had gone round to the north-east, and was driving the sea up with great force; and we clung together and did not say a word, for there seemed nothing for us to say.

And the house shook, and the great doors, some of which were without fastenings, slammed to and fro, and the water continued to rise, though not so rapidly. Never in our lives had we seen aught to compare with it; and we never dreamed that it was not then at its height, until the servants came rushing in, in terrible fright, to say the house was rocking as a cradle, and the ceiling falling, which we already knew too well; and even as they spoke, we heard a great crash, and the north wing, which had been Mr. Guy's room, lay in one great heap of ghastly ruin, which so increased the fear of all, that the servants were persuaded the whole house would fall in upon us, and entreated us to save ourselves; and when we said, "Where can we fly to?" they answered, "Anywhere, rather than remain, where soon we shall be killed and buried in the same breath. The waves cannot be more unkind."

And when they begged us not to "hinder them from going, but to let them save themselves," Violetta, pale and trembling, said they might go, and they rushed away, — whither, none of us ever knew. And the house rocked to and fro more violently, and we were alone in the storm. Alone, did I say? — no, not alone, for God was with us,

though his voice, coming to us through the storm, filled us with terror; and though Otilia tried to sing, the great gale carried her voice far away, and she shrank back in a corner, and cried softly; and Violetta took down from its shelf the Bible, and, turning to the storm on the Sea of Galilee, read how the Saviour had succored the disciples when they were as sorely affrighted as we.

And the child crept up closer to us, and said, "Mistress Violetta, stand me up near the window, and who knows but I may see him coming to us." And Violetta answered, "Nay, my darling, look not out for his coming on the waves, for we cannot see him face to face, until we are with the angels;" but she shook her little head and cried, "If I might look out, he might be coming;" and we did not say her nay, though our tears fell fast as we saw her little form pressed against the window-sash, her tiny hands folded tightly together, and her eyes searching the foaming waves for the Saviour. Once or twice we saw her start, and then the tear-drops would fall, as she saw the imaginary figure fade into a billow; but she did not leave her post again, and Violetta and I knelt together and prayed as we had never done before; and as the last words died upon our lips the house shook fearfully, and the great hall door fell in with a crash, and the wall of another wing lay in ruins, as the first had done. Then Violetta, getting up, commenced wrapping cloaks around Otilia and me, and said, "In the next lull, we must try and regain our father's

house ; " for the roof of the one we were in was prized up already, and was no longer a shelter for us. So we started out. Though the wind was very great, the water had not yet risen more than a foot over the land, and it being yet day we hoped to reach our father's while it was light. — I held to Violetta ; besides, she bound me to her with small, strong cords, and she held the little Otilia in her arms. So we started.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN we first stepped out upon the ground, which in a little circle around the house was not yet covered with water, I came near falling, and Violetta staggered with the child in her arms, but save that I said "God help us!" not one word escaped our lips. The violence of the storm carried my shawl away almost before we had gone two steps. I looked up at my sister, and her face was so white, and her lips so tightly compressed, I turned my gaze away. She seemed as if all hope had gone from her; and though we tried to move quickly, so great was the force of the wind, we were more than two hours in crossing the park. As we stepped into the meadow where the water had risen to be up to our knees, I cried out with terror, it was so cold, and I clasped my arms about Violetta, and screamed out, "Violetta! O sister Violetta! the sea, the great, terrible sea!" But she only looked at me with her wild eyes; there seemed no longer any power to speak. And the waves and the wind kept rising, and the more we tried to get on, the more we were beat back. Darkness, too, was coming on, and the home was, we knew not where, we were so tossed about. The water reached to my waist now, and in a little while I felt I should no longer

keep upon my feet; but I clung closer, closer still to Violetta, and in the fading light I could only see the outline of her face and form. The child still lay in her arms,—the soft, yellow curls hung about her neck, the little hands clasped, the eyes closed; and as a great wave tossed the water over us, she drew her little feet up, and in a voice that sounded clear, but still so faint, said, “Mistress Violetta, soon the big waves will not touch me, for the little mother will have got me;” and the cry that rung out over the waste of water, as my sister clasped her yet more closely, rang in my ears until they were deaf alike to human and all other sounds; and the cords that bound us together snapped, and we two were parted. Oh, the waves! the great, hungry waves! that reached in between us; that leaped and danced in my ears; that drowned my voice when I screamed “Violetta! Violetta!” that only brought to me back a wail, and then tossed me back again; that seemed to be saying over in my ears all the sins that I ever committed; that recalled, to taunt me, every reproachful look of my dear old father, every thoughtless word to my mother; and when I gathered all my strength, and cried, “Father! mother! oh, come to little Meg!” they leaped and danced and whispered in my ear, “Never will they hear thee!” and I felt myself drifting slowly away, drifting somewhere, and I thought, all in dread,

“The sea, the terrible, boundless sea,
Where none shall ever come to me;”

and I sought to get away. I sought to catch hold of something that could keep me ; that could save me from the waves, and they laughed in my ears, and flung me up in their cold embrace, and jeered at me : "We have thee!" I think I must have given one loud scream, for in the dim light I saw a form, and I held my breath, and thought in my poor, simple, childish heart that little Otilia was right, and the Saviour had come to me ; but it was Violetta's voice, and the storm carried all away but the one word "Otilia!" and I sank back upon the billows, and my eyes closed, for feeling was gone, and I ceased to struggle ; but ere I lost consciousness something cold drifted against my hand, and a long, yellow curl swept over my face, and then all was gone and darkness came upon me, and I knew nothing more. They told me all afterward, and I shall go on and speak of others.

At the homestead, where my mother, during all that dreadful day and night, waited for my father and for us three, no harm had been done until near nightfall, when the tabby portion of the building showed signs of giving way ; and Thomas, with an elderly gentleman and his son, who were travelling, and had been compelled to take shelter, insisted on my mother and the maids removing to the loft of a new room then being put up, and which had not been plastered. So soon as they succeeded in getting her there, they tore the weather-boarding off the lower room, allowing the water to pass freely through. The rest of the house, from its age and want of strength, gave way, and all that

made our home was swept away before the dawn of day. The yawl-boat, the foresight of Thomas had secured to the posts of the room they were in.

As the fury of the storm had abated near day, my poor mother, half crazed about her absent ones, begged on her knees that some one would go and see if we yet lived, she thinking my father was with us at the manor. So, as soon as it was possible after day, the three men left in the boat to go to the manor. They say Thcmas, good, faithful old Thomas, sobbed like a child and wrung his hands, when he saw the crumbling ruin, and the desolation around. Yet greater desolation was in his heart than the loss of goods and household gear could occasion; for the master and the bairns — where were they? and who could tell to Rachel her children “were not”? Who could return to the frantic mother, that rocked herself to and fro with no one to offer comfort, and say to her, “Thy household goods are wherever the wild waves list; the sea has thy treasure. Clasp the bare arms over the bosom that may no more shelter loved ones; fold the hands; bear patiently; for the Lord has smitten thee, and the sea only can give up thy dead”? None dared to think of it; and so, like men driven to desperation, they drifted over the waste of waters, and went from one bare ruin to another, for where could they seek the old man, and where his children? And yet which man of the three who sat in the boat could find it in his heart to tell the mother they had not sought far and wide?

It was near the middle of the day Thomas always said, when, as they drifted towards what is known in that part of the country as an Indian mound, on the farther side something caught the eye of the young man, and when they neared it, it was found to be my senseless figure. I never knew exactly how long I had lain there. I think I knew, in an indistinct way, when the force of the waves threw me beyond their own control. I was lifted into the boat, and from a small flask the old man carried, life was brought back to me. They sought for some trace of Violetta and the child; but, finding none, they took me home. Home! Home to the loft of one bare room! home to the empty hearth! The brandy and my own great weakness over-powered me; and I never knew anything of my return, or my mother's first glad shout. I have heard that they had to damp that first joy over her lost and found, for fear it should harm me. When I first remember anything distinctly, it was, I think, towards sunset the next day. Then it was I woke from a long, refreshing sleep, and my eyes rested on a pale, ghastly figure beside the small attic window; and though I could hardly comprehend what ailed her, I knew the features were Violetta's, and I held my breath and tried to close my eyes, and so shut out the face of my sister. But I could not. I was seized with a feverish idea that it could not be Violetta, — that it was the face and form of a lost soul, that, somewhere I had heard, wandered about, shut out from heaven, from earth,

from hell; that could only roam on forever without rest. Her eyes, so soft and blue, looked as if some great dread were frozen in their depths; her hair was hanging around her shoulders, and her hands were clasped over the windowsill. At first, I did not remember anything that had happened, I was lost in so many thoughts. Only was I recalled to what had been, as I listened to her voice, which seemed a wail of intense misery:—

“ O God ! the little child, the little one ! O God ! where shall I find her ? Where shall I find her when they call for her ? I held her in my arms until they seemed frozen in the waters. I held her, and I felt her slipping from me. I tried, oh ! I tried to keep her ; but my arms were numb ; they refused to hold her. What shall I say — what shall I say when they call for her ? Why did not I die too ? Why was I left to say to him, *I* have not kept her — the little mother is keeping her ? Oh, who will tell him ? Who will say I did all I could, — that the waters beat in my face, and I could not tell which way to go ? Have pity, O God, and spare me this great misery ; take me before I tell him that I was afraid to stay in that great house ; that I carried the two babes out and they are both gone. O Christ, spare me the vision of the two little forms washed out to sea ; cast some blindness over my brain before I see the fishes, the sharks, the slimy monsters of the sea clutching at them. Oh, spare me, for the load is greater than I can bear ! ” — and as she spoke she hid her

face in her arms, and I could see her whole form quiver, as if with an earthquake which would shatter the poor stricken heart ; and I said, in my weak voice : —

“ Violetta, dear sister, the fishes have not got me. I am here, sweet sister ! ”

But she only raised her bloodshot eyes, and looked at me in that uncomprehending way, so terrible for us to see in those we love, and fell to beating the sill with her fingers. No one was in the room with us, and I grew frightened, and tried to call for help, which seemed to recall her, and, coming to me, she said, “ Maggie, is there anything I can do ? ” But as she stooped to hand me a glass of wine, she fell heavily over on the bed, in a faint, so like death that I screamed ; and Bettie came running up the ladder that answered for stairs from the lower room to the loft.

“ Gracious me ! ” said Bettie, “ the latter days must be upon us ! ” And when I tried to render some assistance, she motioned me to be still, saying, as she applied the simple restoratives within reach : —

“ Do you lie still and not bother, Mistress Meg ; it’s only yesterday you was nearer dead than alive, and now it’s the young mistress. Who knows what’s in three days ? I, Bettie Cribb, don’t, for certain.”

“ But, Bettie,” I could not help saying, “ I feel stronger now, and I begin to remember things. I know I was picked up from some place ; but how came I here in the

new room-attic, and how came Violetta to be so? Tell me how it all happened. Where are my father and mother, and why, if I've been sick, don't they come here?"

"How could I answer all them questions, mistress Maggie? You always knows too much, and it's more than good for you to be behindhand this morning."

But I could not be satisfied, and when Violetta sank off in a deep sleep, Bettie was prevailed upon to give me all the information she knew. She dearly loved to tell news to any who were anxious to hear, and if one but encouraged her, there was no end to the things of importance she could speak of,—from the county elections to the minister's new gown; she was well posted on all. Feeling my pulse, and finding I had no fever, she sat down beside me, and while she talked in a low voice, she untangled the curls that had been matted together for so many days, and were stiff from the salt-sea waves.

"It was Friday, Mistress Meg,—the day after the great gale, and the strange gentleman had gone with Thomas,—that mistress and I were up here with several of the maids, and I was trying to say a word or two of comfort to her, poor, dear lady, and while I said the little I knew of learning to her—"

"And why did you talk to her about learning, Bettie?" I broke in. "That surely isn't comfort." But she did not allow me to get any further, for she stopped me, saying, not in ill-nature:—

"And what is comfort, anyhow? Mistress Meg, to my notion there isn't any spoken word that can cure sorrow right away. The good Lord himself takes time to heal the sorrow he sends, and it remains with us whether our sorrow is to do us any good,—for it isn't the sorrow that makes us better; it's how we heal up, to my notion it is."

And I held my peace, seeing that perhaps Bettie was right after all, and she went on with her story:—

"All of a sudden, as I was going to say before, Nannie, who always had but little sense, screamed out that 'a ghost was coming towards the house,' and 'it was the ghost of her poor, young lady; ' and at that the mistress fainted dead away; and while some of the foolish things hid their faces for fright, and I tried to recall your mother, the stairs creaked, and in the door stood your poor sister. Never can I forget her face,—how wild she looked,—and how, when I took her hand, I felt my blood chill through and through; for it was icy cold. All I could say was to beg her to put on a dry gown, and tell me where she came from, and where the others were; but she looked at me as if she were talking in a dream, and, shaking her head, only said:—

"'I climbed up in a tree, and when day returned, I came home.'

"And though I asked her the same question over and over, she gave me only that one answer; she never varied; and she haint seemed to know anybody, or

notice how things have gone; she keeps moaning to herself and wringing her hands."

"Bettie," I said, suddenly, "Bettie, where is my father?"

"Where, poor little one," she answered, "where but at home?"

"And if at home, why doesn't he come and see Violetta and me?" I asked.

"Because — because —" she said, and though the poor creature tried to dissemble, she took me in her arms and sobbed aloud, and I turned my face away. I could not bear that any one should tell me any more. I knew enough, — I knew that from that distant deed of charity he had never returned; that out on the waves he had drifted until the harbor of a better world had received his pure soul into "the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

I said no more to any one; and that night my sister Violetta fell ill, and for days we thought she never would be anything more to us on earth; but on the tenth day the fever left her, and she had come back to us again; and in tears my dear mother put her arms around us, and prayed to know "which way to go, and how to shelter these from such evils again." And so we removed next week to an inland village, where the stranger and his son lived; and there we stayed, until I was twenty and Violetta thirty. And not one of us ever heard one word from Master Reginald Guy in all that time. All we knew was that large land-owners had bought the manor lands, and that Mr. Guy had gone

away. Violetta never spoke of him after one day, when she said : —

“ Meggie, would God I had died before I left the manor, — for Reginald once said to me, he could never forgive any one that had been instrumental in robbing him of his little child. O Meggie ! all fell but the body of the house ; had I stayed she would have been here now. Oh for one kind word, one gentle look ! Oh, say, will God take me, before he gives me that ? Will I never, never, have one word to cool the fever that seems burning my brain ? ”

And I, putting my arms around her, said : —

“ Violetta, God feeds the hungry heart, and he is a better keeper of the little child than any of us could have been. Sister, from the darkness of death, both Otilia and our father passed into the glorious light ; the old man and the little child are hand in hand there, as they were here ; they are very happy. Violetta, don’t wish they were back ; for so pure and guileless as our father was, the little one is dear to him there as well as here.”

“ I know — I know — ” she burst in, “ but oh ! if she had not slipped from my arms ; if he had only come to say, ‘ Violetta, I forgive you,’ — O Meggie ! I had asked no more, though my poor heart cried, like one perishing for one drop of love.”

And I, what could I say ? I could not scan the future ; I could not recall the past ; I could only love her ;

and I put my arms around her and said no word, for I thought peradventure the Lord will lead the broken heart best up to him.

And the days grew into months, and the months into years, and a calm like that which breaks upon a shipwrecked vessel, when the waves go down and the winds lull, had stolen upon Violetta, and when we were watching beside my mother, who never was strong after that terrible gale, we lost sight, in a measure, of the gloom that had fallen upon the young life. And after much watching our mother passed away, and we two were left to be one and all to each other.

And when the year of our mourning was over, Violetta went with me to my new home, which was upon the same spot our old home had been. And there it was I felt saddest for her; my own life seemed so full of love, and hers so empty. It seemed to me I could enter into her heart, and though all was still, and no murmur fell on my ear to mar the quiet, yet the strings of the lute were severed in twain,—the vase was broken, the perfume was gone; the spirit was no longer a spirit, it was only an existence, that moaned to itself, and tasted no sweet human love. The face grew whiter each day, and the eyes—never so beautiful as when they seemed now to droop with the weight of unshed tears—haunted my sight, and I longed to tear away the cloud, and let the sunshine fall into her life, as it fell daily into mine. Much as I loved each drop, I

would have spared her part, if I could. It was the only shadow I knew, and though we tried with loving hands to add to her joy, she only said she was happy as she could be, and our loving deeds did not change the pale face, or take one tear from the eyes that were heavy with their weight. I grew terrified; there was such gentleness about her, I feared God was healing the broken spirit for himself, and I lost sight of Bettie's words. I could not see that the gentleness came of the healing, being a healing and not a suffering.

Violetta, my husband, and I, in our sea-coast home, were all to each other; and sometimes I felt tempted to bless the gale that had made his father, and mine now, sojourn with us,— it was so sweet to think that the arms which sheltered me now had taken me from the waters and saved me from such death; but my joy would suddenly cease, for I remembered my sister Violetta; that, where much had been given me, all had been taken from her. We know so little of the beauty of this sweet, human love, until we see the death of it in another. We would never know how fresh and beautiful green boughs are, if our eyes never rested on a sapless, leafless trunk.

CHAPTER X.

Two years, with their changing seasons, had passed since we had come home. Twice the spring in dewy smiles had trembled into summer, and been folded into autumn, and winter, grasping them all, had clasped the year with icy bands together, and now spring was upon us again ; and as I sat on the low piazza, and sang a lullaby to the babe within my arms, the golden sun sank in banks of purple, and the ring-doves settled to rest, and the sea ebbed and flowed so gently, and I felt so at rest in my heart. The baby and the baby's father were so much to love, and all I had to spare from them was Violetta's, — so there was no nook or corner that was not full. And through the open window I could see my sister, and there was peace in the tearful eyes, that seemed at last to wait patiently ; and when the latchet of the gate opened, and a stranger came towards the house, I thought, "I will but put the little one down to rest, and be back in time to bid him welcome for the night." But I was detained a few moments longer than I thought ; the baby was not well, and when it moaned in its sleep, I could but stay to hush it into quiet slumber ; and then I went out quickly, and the

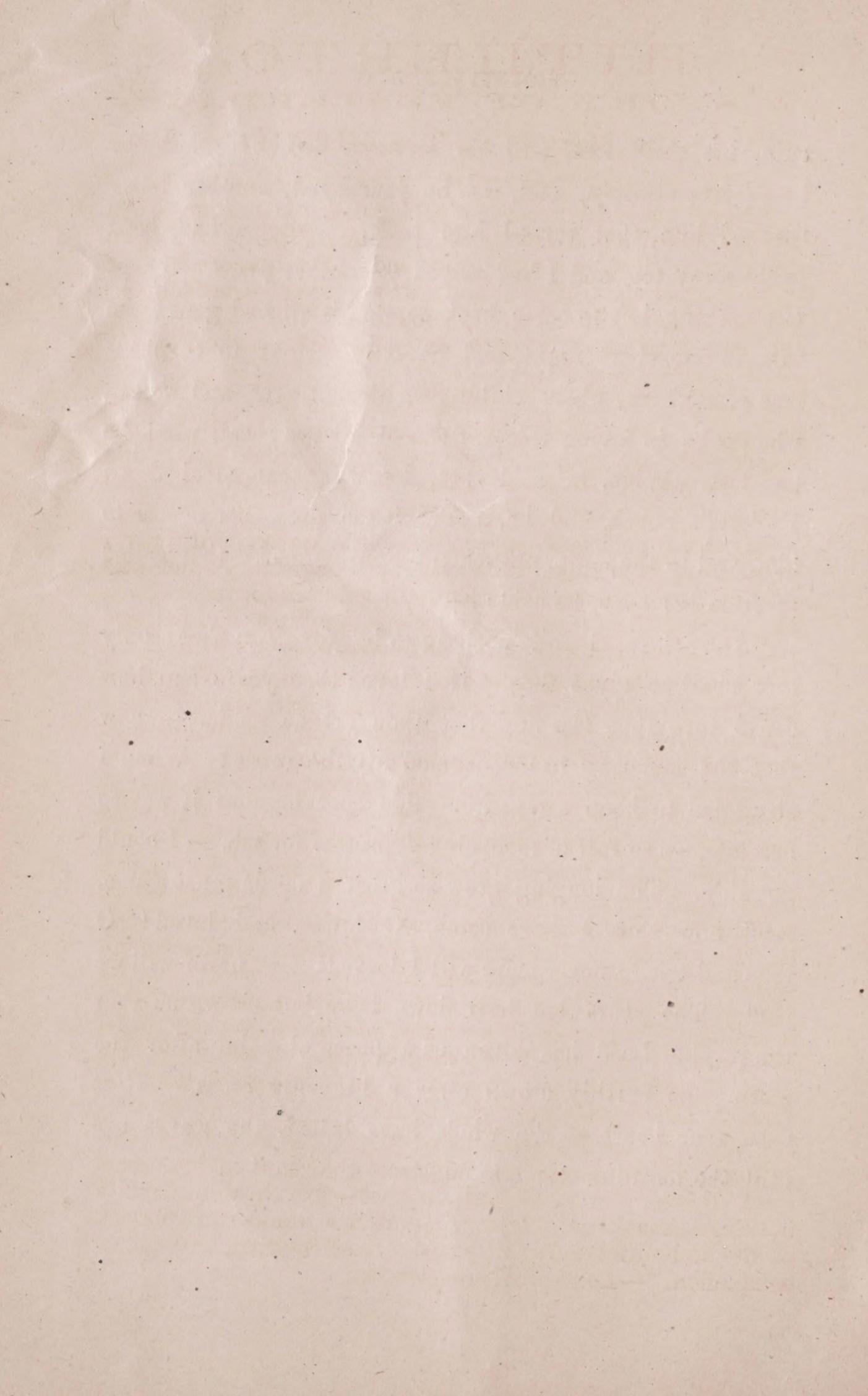
stranger was no longer there, but instead, my husband, who called me near him, and we saw Violetta sitting in the golden light of the fading day, and the stranger leaning over her. And my heart beat until I could count its throbbing, — for the happiness was come again to Violetta ; the lute was strung ; the vase was filled afresh, and I knew the patient love was filling all her soul with its one glad song. *Master Reginald Guy had come.* It seemed to us all as if the wings of unseen angels hovered round ; as if the echo of some anthem had reached our world, and given us all this one great joy. And my husband and I were content to sit in the shadowy twilight and wait until we knew more, so sure we felt that the darkness was lifted from our sister's heart.

Softly as the moonbeams fell, and the sea waves rippled on the strand, so softly the two who sat in the window came to us. There was no mock modesty shown after that reunion. After those twelve years spent in weary waiting, the color came and went in happy blushes on her cheek ; the eyes forgot their tears : the whole face of my sister Violetta spoke more plainly than any tongue can tell how entirely she had loved the sunburnt man beside her. And sitting, we four, in the moonlight, the simple story was told.

In the distant country to which he had gone to attend the death-bed of his only uncle, he had heard of that awful gale ; had seen, in the letter of a friend, that his home was a

ruin, his child lost, and his servants fled. He left for home immediately, and, as he journeyed, another letter reached him, that turned him back. Violetta had been swept away too, and I had moved to another place. There was nothing left to come back to,—his all had gone from him in one short night, and he only sought to turn his face somewhere, where children with soft eyes, and women who spoke in loving voices, did not always recall what he had lost. When he said that, I saw a tear steal down Violetta's cheek, and he, seeing it too, drew her nearer to him, and to the mute, unspoken “Forgive me!” that welled up from her eyes, he said: —

“ Dear love, there is nothing to be *forgiven* thee; only *love* shall be given thee. If I loved thee years ago, how can I love thee less now that thou art so tender;—now that the suffering has consumed all the dross? When I struggled to keep away from this spot because it was so desolate,—so full of mourning cypresses for me,—I could not stay. The longing grew so great, I needs must come. And now that I have come, O loving and loved! O true and tried! never more will I leave thee,—never will we part. The years that have flown have but shown us that the pitying Lord has given us a peaceful calm after the storm; an earthly crown after a heavenly cross. Rest thee, true heart,—the winds have lulled, the waves are still, the morning star is rising from the sea.”



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See Vol. 45, Page 542.

No. 752

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EDITED BY

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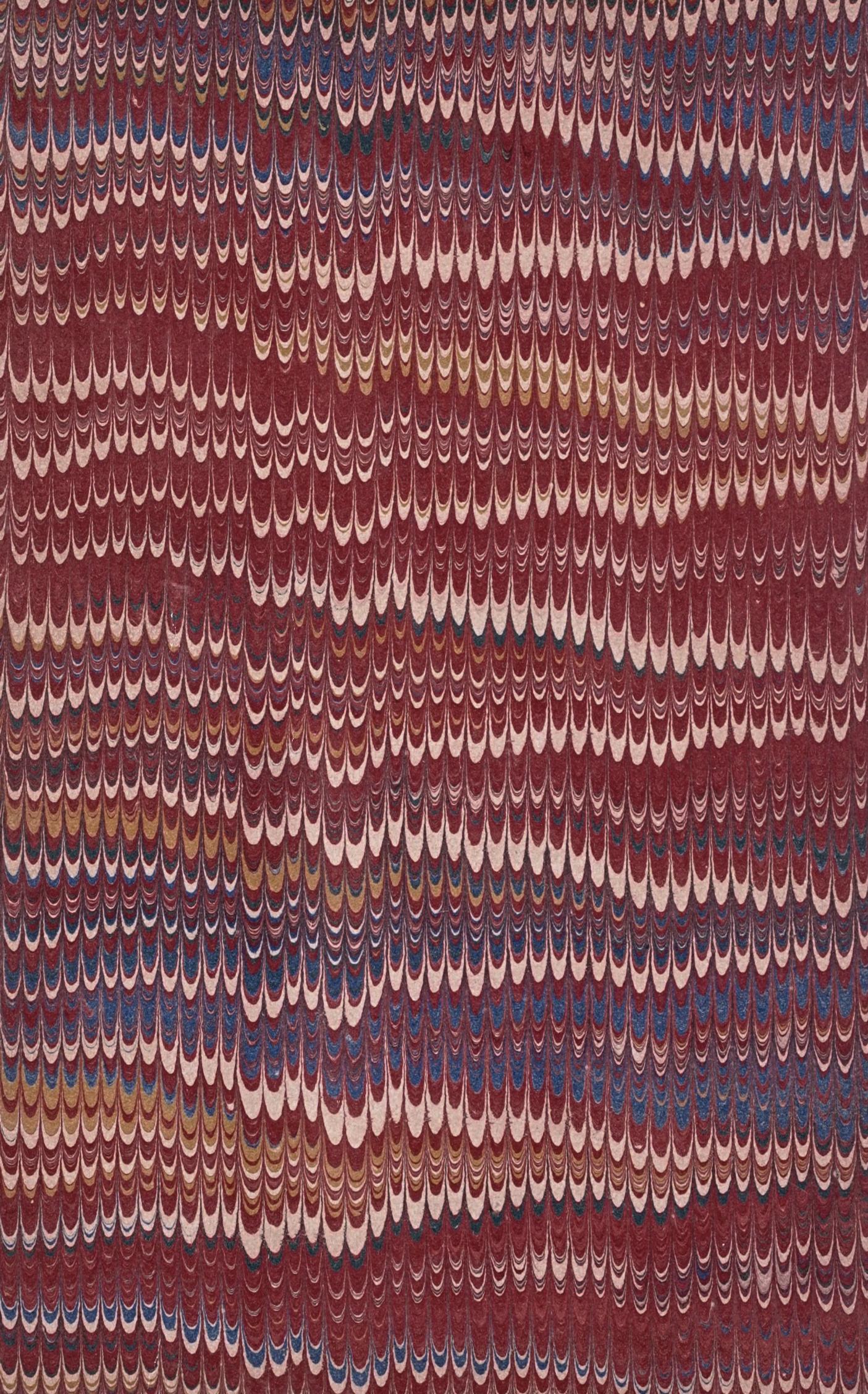
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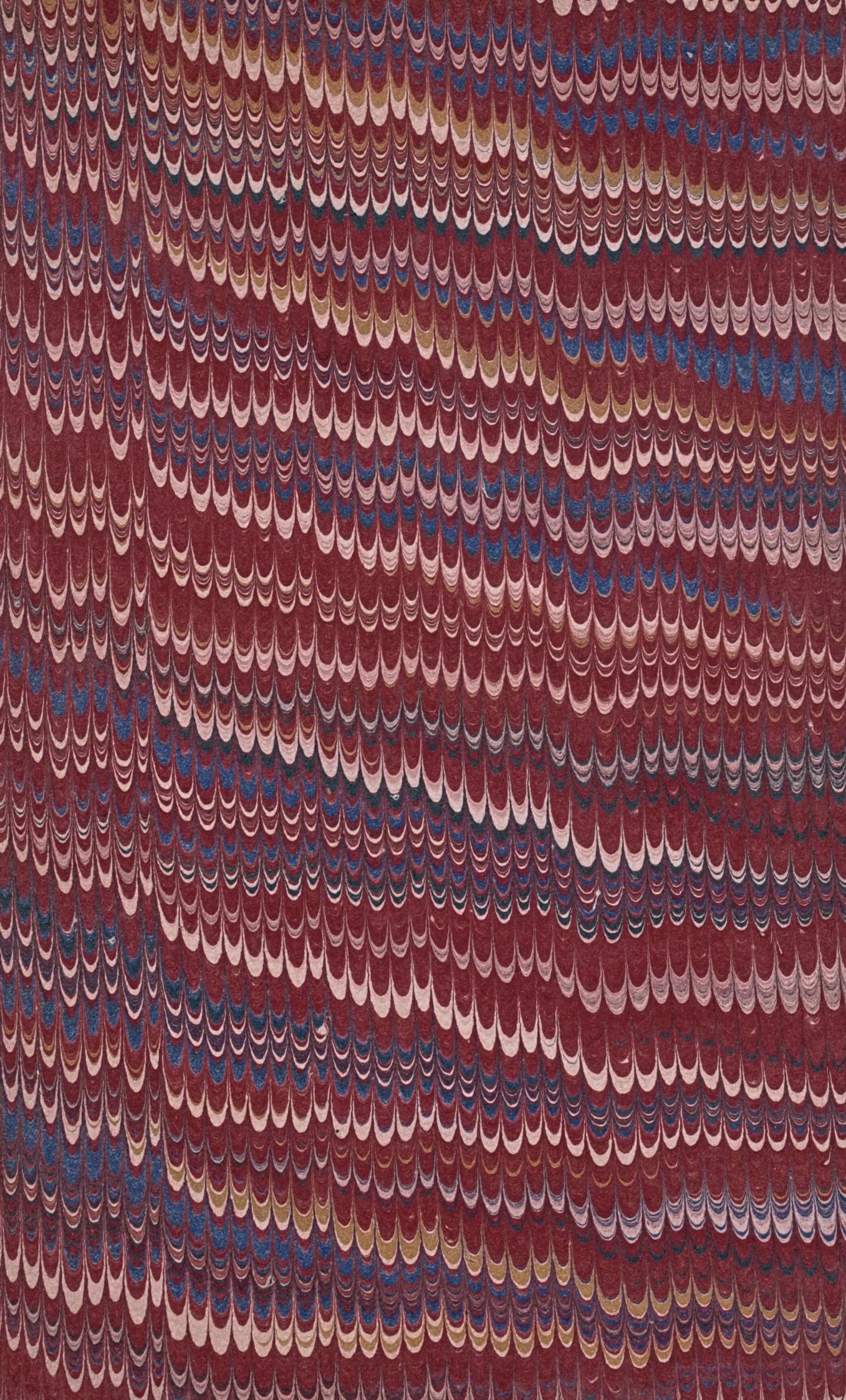
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